

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 3058

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: CONGRESS AND THE OPPOSITION BRING THEIR CAMPAIGNS TO
DELHI

REF: NEW DELHI 2679

SUMMARY: BOTH THE CONGRESS AND THE JANATA/CFD BROUGHT THEIR
CAMPAIGNS TO THE CAPITAL ON MARCH 1 IN A HECTIC SERIES OF RALLIES
AND GATHERINGS STAGED AROUND THE CITY. ALTHOUGH THE RHETORIC
IN THE SPEECHES REFLECTED THE THEMES CITED IN REFTEL, THE MARKED
CONTRAST IN THE SIZE AND ENTHUSIASM OF THE CORWDS SEEMED TO
CONFIRM THE INTENSITY OF THE SO-CALLED "JANATA WAVE" IN DELHI.
END SUMMARY.

1. MRS. GANDHI ADDRESSED FIVE PUBLIC MEETINGS AROUND DELHI ON
BEHALF OF CONGRESS CANDIDATES. SHE REPEATED HER CONTENTIONS THAT
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THE JANATA WAS A "MOTLEY" ASSESSMENT
OF OPPORTUNISTIC OPPOSITION
PARTIES WHICH WAS DOMINATED BY THE JANSANGH. SHE DECLARED THAT THE
JAN SANGH ITSELF WAS A FRONT FOR THE RSS, WHICH WAS RESPONSIBLE
FOR MAHATMA GANDHI'S MURDER. AT HER SPEECH IN THE PREDOMINANTLY
MUSLIM OLD CITY, SHE STRESSED THE COMMUNAL NATURE OF THE OPPO-
SITION AND ASKED MUSLIMS TO REMEMBER THIS FACT WHEN THEY CAST

THEIR BALLOTS. THE PM AGAIN CHARACTERIZED HERSELF AS A SELFLESS SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE, BUT SEEMED UNUSUALLY DEFENSIVE ON THE FAMILY PLANNING ISSUE, CONCEDED THAT MISTAKES AND EXCESSES HAD BEEN COMMITTEE-- PERHAPS "EVEN BECAUSE OF THE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP". SIMILARLY, SHE ADOPTED A DEFENSIVE TONE IN HER REMARKS ON THE FORCED RESETTLEMENT OF SLUM DWELLERS: CONCEDED THAT MISTAKS MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE, SHE NONETHELESS ARGUED THAT NO COMPLAINTS HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO HER ATTENTION WHEN SHE HAD VISITED THE RESETTLEMENT COLONIES.

2. OBSERVERS AGREED THAT THE CROWDS AT THE PM'S RALLIES WERE LARGE, BUT NOT ALWAYS ATTENTIVE AND DISCIPLINED. HER AUDIENCE IN THE OLD CITY SEEMED TO CONSIST MAINLY OF POORER PEOPLE, MUSLIMS AS WELL AS OTHERS, AND WAS DESCRIBED AS REASONABLY POLITE AND ATTENTIVE. THE PM WAS CHEERED AT THE END OF HER REMARKS. IN CONTRAST, THE LARGE CROWD AT HER LUNCHTIME SPEECH IN THE AREA NEAR GOI MINISTRIES CONSISTED MAINLY OF GOVT EMPLOYEES WHO WERE NOTABLY RESTLESS AND INDIFFERENT. HER REMARKS EVOKED LITTLE RESPONSE FROM THE AUDIENCE, LARGE SECTIONS OF WHICH BEGAN TO LEAVE BEFORE SHE HAD FINISHED. REFERRING TO THOSE DEPARTING, SHE SAID SHE REALIZED THAT THE LUNCH HOUR WAS OVER AND THAT WORKERS HAD TO RETURN TO THEIR OFFICES. ATTEMPTS BY CONGRESS WORKERS TO LEAD THE CROWD IN SHOUTING SLOGANS SUPPORTING MRS. GANDHI FELL ON DEAF EARS. IN FACT, THERE WERE BOOS AND DERISIVE LAUGHTER WHEN THE PM REFERRED TO FAMILY PLANNING AND FORCED RESETTLEMENT OF SLUM-DWELLERS. SHOUTS OF "JANTA PARTY ZINDABAD" WERE RAISED AS SHE LEFT.

3. THE JANATA PARTY AND CFD BROUGHT OUT THEIR BIG GUNS FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEIR RALLIES AROUND THE CITY: JAGJIVAN RAM, RAJ NARAIN (WHO IS OPPOSING MRS. GANDHI IN RAE BARELLI), MRS. VIJAN LAKSHMI PANDIT (THE PM'S AUNT WHO IS WORKING FOR THE CFD), H.N. BAHUGUNA, AND ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE (THE JANTA LEADER WHO IS CONTESTING THE NEW DELHI SEAT) SPEECHES FOLLOWED THE FAMILIAR LINES: MRS. GANDHI HAD DECLARED THE EMERGENCY ONLY TO RETAIN HER OWN POSITION. THE ELECTION WAS THE LAST CHANCE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP. THE JANATA AND CFD WERE NOT FIGHTING AGAINST AN INDIVIDUAL BUT RATHER IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES. SOME SPEAKERS PARTICULARLY CONDEMNED THE EXCESSES OF THE EMERGENCY SUCH AS COERCIVE STERILIZATION, ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND FORCED RESETTLEMENT OF SLUM-DWELLERS.

4. FROM SEVERAL EYEWITNESS COMPARISON, THE CROWDS AT THE OPPOSITION RALLIES WERE BOTH LARGER AND MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THAN AT THE CONGRESS GATHERINGS. ACCORDING TO ONE ESTIMATE, THE AUDIENCE AT THE JANATA/CFD'S LATE AFTERNOON RALLY NEAR GOVT OFFICES WAS THREE TIMES AS LARGE AS THE ONE FOR THE PM'S EARLIER SPEECH AT THE SAME VENUE; OBSERVERS ESTIMATED THE CROWD (AGAIN LARGELY

COMPOSED OF GOVT EMPLOYEES) AT OVER 100,000. NEWS ACCOUNTS AND OBSERVERS REPORTED THAT PERSONS ATTENDING OPPOSITION RALLIES WERE ORDERLY, ENTHUSIASTIC AND ATTENTIVE DURING THE SPEECHES. REFERENCES TO FAMILY PLANNING AND OTHER EXCESSES EVOKED CRIES OF "SHAME, SHAME". SPEAKERS RECEIVED LOUD OVATIONS (PARTICULARLY RAM) AND THEIR REMARKS WERE OCCASIONALLY INTERRUPTED BY PRO-JANATA AND ANTI-MRS. GANDHI SLOGANS.

5. PERHAPS THE MOST GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION OF THE OPPOSITION'S MASS APPEAL IN DELHI OCCURRED AT ITS FINAL GATHERING AT THE JAMA MASJID ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 1. WE UNDERSTAND FROM OBSERVERS THAT RESIDENTS OF THE OLD CITY HAD NEVER BEFORE SEEN SO LARGE A CROWD IN THE AREA. SPEAKERS INCLUDED RAM, BAHUGUNA AND MRS. PANDIT, BUT THE STAR ATTRACTION WAS THE IMAM (HEAD PRIEST) OF THE JAMA MASJID. IN WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE STRONGEST AND MOST PROVOCATIVE ATTACKS HEARD THUS FAR IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAMPAIGN, THE IMAM DESCRIBED ALLEGED ATROCITIES IN THE OLD CITY AND STATED THAT THE ROAD LEADING FROM THE MASJID THROUGH TURKMAN GATE AND MUZZAFARNAGAR TO SULTANPUR (ALL SCENES OF VIOLENCE DUE TO FP AND/OR SLUM CLEARANCE) WAS INDIA'S "RED SQUARE", RED WITH THE BLOOD OF THE VICTIMS OF OFFICIAL HIGHHANDEDNESS. HE WENT ON TO PRAISE THE JAN SANGH FOR ITS OPPOSITION TO THE GOVT AND APPEALED FOR COMMUNAL UNITY AND HARMONY AMIDST SHOUTS OF "HINDUS AND MUSLIMS ARE BROTHERS".

6. COMMENT: IT HAS BEEN EVIDENT FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT DELHI IS NOT FRIENDLY TURF FOR CONGRESS AND THE PM. MRS. GANDHI'S DEFENSIVE REMARKS ABOUT FAMILY PLANNING AND OTHER BUREAUCRATIC EXCESSES AND THE DERISIVE RESPONSE THEY ELICITED APPEAR TO REFLECT THE REALIZATION THAT MANY RESIDENTS OF THE CAPITAL STRONGLY RESENT THESE ASPECTS OF THE EMERGENCY. FOR ITS PART THE OPPOSITION APPEARS INTENT ON GAINING MAXIMUM POPULAR APPEAL BY HARD-HITTING ATTACKS ON THESE ISSUES. WHILE THEY UNDOUBTEDLY CAN GAIN POLITICAL MILEAGE OUT OF THESE "EXCESSES", THE JANATA AND CONGRESS HAVE THE ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF HAVING LEADERS WHO ARE SUPERB ORATORS AND CROWD PLEASERS. EXCEPT FOR THE PM HERSELF, THERE ARE VIRTUALLY NO LEADERS IN THE CONGRESS WHO CAN MATCH RAM'S DIGNITY, VAJPAYEE'S RHETORIC OR RAJ NARAIN'S SARCASM. SCHNEIDER

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